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**SPORTSMANSHIP IN BUSINESS AND
PUBLIC LIFE**

ALBERT T. PERKINS



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SPORTSMANSHIP IN BUSINESS AND PUBLIC LIFE

An Address by
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The United Railways of St. Louis

Delivered at the
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UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI

Volume XIV

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SPORTSMANSHIP IN BUSINESS AND PUBLIC LIFE.

By Col. Albert T. Perkins.

In thinking over what message I might bring to you from the experiences of a rather active career, two factors in making a successful life came into my mind—*loyalty* and *sportsmanship*. I decided to talk to you about *sportsmanship*.

Perhaps you have been used to thinking of sportsmanship as the spirit of fair play in sports or games. But sports and games have all developed as imitations of or idealizations of phases of serious life. The latter is true too of all of our intellectual pleasures—the drama, music, art.

You and I have played various games. These games in their present form are the result of centuries of development. Some of you have been hunters and you have in your mind the distinction between the sportsman hunter and the pot hunter.

You have been playing your games as amateurs. Now you are going to play a bigger game as professionals. The difference between an amateur and a professional is not one of sportsmanship. The idea of the professional is connected up with the necessity of earning one's food and clothes.

Dr. Spaeth—a fine type of sportsman and a rare combination of coach of the rowing crews and Professor of English Literature at Princeton—was saying the other day (as I remember it) "don't go into a game you can't afford to lose; but when you are in the game play it as if you couldn't possibly afford to lose it."

Well, that is sound from the point of view of a game as play. But what you are coming to now is, in baseball language, a long "series" and it will be the "series" which you can't afford to lose, and mustn't lose.

A young athlete wrote to Major Henry Lee Higginson after the latter's inspiring address in dedicating Soldier's Field in June 1890—"It matters but little the week after, whether a boat race or a football match be won or lost; but let a man or a team do but a single thing which is not entirely manly and aboveboard, and it sets them back in the *real* race perhaps for years."

So as you come to the commencement of the *real* race I made my subject "Sportsmanship in *Business and Public Life*."

The old adage that "All's fair in love and war" is a relic of the savage state. Treachery is something we at once attribute to the savage or to those in whom the instincts of the savage predominate.

Sportsmanship—fair play—is entirely a product of civilization, frequently being reverted from here and there but always in the long run spreading and growing in intensity. Doubtless it influenced war before it did business or civil administration. In the times of those famous sportsman warriors, The Cid Rodrigo de Bivar, Richard Coeur de Lion, and the Chevalier Bayard, it went by the name of "Honour."

You don't expect to take part in a war. Neither did I when I graduated from college. But before I pass to civil business, let me quote you one passage from a sportsman soldier.

The French General, Baron de Marbot, describing in his *Memoires* the trick played by Marshals Lannes and Murat on the Austrian General, d'Auersperg, in getting hold of the Spitz bridge over the Danube before the battles of d'Essling and Wagram in 1905 (which he estimated would otherwise have cost 30,000 men) says (my apologies to him for my translation): "But was the stratagem of which they made use admissible? I don't think so. I know that in wars between state and state one stretches his conscience under pretext that everything which assures victory may be employed in order to diminish the losses of men, all in giving great advantage to one's country. Still, in spite of these serious considerations, I don't think one ought to approve the means employed to seize the Spitz bridge; as for me I would not do it in like circumstances."

The *Sportsman* in Business—the man of square dealing, of fair play, who has the coolness to meet imperturbed all emergencies! It seems to me a most fundamental requirement is a thoroughly clear realization that no valid excuse exists for a departure from one's own ideals and rules of conduct, in the knowledge or belief that the other fellow is doing it. That is something where one is often getting into a fog—a mist which arises around one's relations to his employes, to the public, to his business competitors, and to the government.

You may be engaged in what might be called independent professional work, or in the employ of what are called private corporations, or in the employ of public utilities. But in the past thirty-five years our Government (National and State) has been establishing an increasing control over *all* business and professional activities. It has been making rules by which the business game is to be played. Many experiments have been tried and many errors made, just as in the development of the football or baseball rules.

Yet there has been undoubted advance in the soundness and fairness of rules made by the government; though the peculiarity of

this situation is that as a whole, government in respect to fair play has followed instead of leading.

One might naturally expect that Government would set a good example of fairness in business dealings; but unfortunately many of those handling business affairs of governmental departments have not been brought up in principles of business sportsmanship and their transactions (not for personal gain, but for their departments) have often been of a character abhorrent to the majority of business men.

There seems to be some reaction in that respect, for business men of character and experience are gradually taking more part in governmental affairs.

Now the Government has to come in as a rule maker in business and public utility affairs because the minority would not otherwise play fairly, and the rules had perhaps to weigh heavily both on the fair and unfair players.

It is 35 years since the Interstate Commerce Law was passed. In its early days that was broken in all directions. It took years, with the addition of many modifications and penalties, to make its rules thoroughly effective. The explanation of its violation in any case was almost always that it was to meet the violation by somebody else.

Since then we have had a series of regulatory laws affecting almost all classes of business; and there is a great advance in the willingness and the desire to obey them.

Within this period there has been another marked advance from a widespread feeling among business men that municipal legislators were for sale and had to be purchased even in matters of much concern to the public. The business men who lead have become too good sportsmen nowadays to fall into that sort of thing or to tolerate it on the part of others.

One often hears the statement that railroads and public utilities and other large business corporations have brought their troubles on themselves, coupled sometimes with expressions of sympathy, now that they are trying to do better. But has it not been that the rules were in the making and loose and not enforced by competent umpires and referees; and that those who have worked as sportsmen have frequently been upset by blows below the belt? And the public did not and could not understand all the rules.

The public is always calling for more and better service from its utilities and properly so. It wants it too as cheaply as it can get it. But the public does not and cannot generally understand all the conditions underlying the production of such utilities and the cost of their operation.

On the other hand the managers of most utilities are nowadays doing their utmost to give the public the best service to which their means will stretch.

It seems to me that one of the greatest advances in the matter

of fair play has of late years come as in our state, in the transferring of the control and regulation of public utilities from municipalities with their political turmoil and changing policies to a state commission where, whatever its defects, codes of principles and rules may be developed and the rights of both the served and the servers calmly considered.

You still hear and read statements that rates charged by public utilities are high because the utility companies are over-capitalized, i. e. have so-called "watered stocks."

Those statements are based on an entirely wrong impression of the present situation.

Formerly these public utility rates were fixed by local franchises—as 75 cents for gas or 5 cents for street car service. Whatever may have been the effect on confiding investors, it then made no material difference to the public served whether the capitalization of the serving company were fifty million dollars or one hundred million dollars or one hundred and fifty millions, until such time as the public began to demand more and better service than could be produced for those fixed franchise rates.

Now that is just what the public began demanding. The old franchise rates ceased to meet the requirements, but with their casting aside, went also any right to a new basis of rates in excess of what should produce a fair rate of return on a fair valuation of the serving property, irrespective of what its former capitalization may have been—rates sufficient and only sufficient to pay the cost of producing the quantity and quality of service demanded by the public served.

This producing cost—wages, materials, taxes, and a fair return on a fair valuation of the serving property—the last and in the long run the first of these factors in the hands of a state commission representing the people but removed from local influences and prejudices and subject only to review by the courts. The factor of taxes remains in no small degree in the hands of the local communities themselves.

This matter of valuation of existing properties has features of great complexities and requires the exercise of the highest degree of wisdom, judgment, and the spirit of fair play on the part of the commissioners; for the valuation now is for fair rate-making purposes. It is the duty of the Commission under the law to make *fair* valuations—not unduly *low*, not unduly *high*. As time goes on this task will be simpler, for all issuance of new securities for additional capital investment in public utilities is now under control of the Commission.

Now I have said that in the long run the first factor—wages—is also really under control of the commission, and here it seems to me, our spirit of fair play should in the highest degree come into action. This factor usually represents half or more of the rates charged the public. With the cost of material fixed from time to time by market conditions which Commissions cannot at least as yet control, with the valuation or new capitalization and rate of return

fixed by the commission, and the taxes fixed by government authorities, the public may know what it is paying for, and the actual rates of charge for service must depend primarily on the rates of wages (the degree of efficiency being taken fully into account); or vice versa the rates of wages must depend on the charge the utility is permitted to make for service.

So here we have the most serious of all problems—the balance of the rates of wages for the various classes of employes serving the public, as between those receiving the wages and the public who pay them.

In a way there is a satisfaction in this situation as it now exists. It brings out clearly that if they play fairly the employes of a public utility must give the very best service they are capable of to the public, and the public through their representatives must in return provide for the payment of an adequate and even liberal reward.

You are going into business at a time when an uncomfortable process of readjustment of wages and prices is still going on—a time when there is the greatest need on the part of all concerned for a spirit of fair play.

Everybody who works faithfully is justified in asking the highest reward he honorably and fairly can obtain for his services; but it is hard to look at these matters from an unprejudiced point of view when one's own private interest is involved. And present conditions are complicated by the fact that in the hurry and stress of war conditions adjustments of wages did not come to all crafts and occupations on an even or proportionate basis.

I find myself in an interesting position at the head of a little army of 6,000 public utility servants, with bad actors for the most part weeded out, and with most of these 6,000 trying their best to do a good job for the public.

In the latter part of 1921 we had, in order to keep within our resources, to make some considerable reductions in wages from the high peak established in 1920. These were made in different degrees in different crafts, after long but amicable conferences and discussions with the committees of those involved, on scales which a combination of several circumstances seemed to make just.

But I am attacked by persons in public life wishing to curry favor with the unthinking sections of the public; but knowing nothing of the comparative deserts or requirements or the so-called working conditions of the employes involved, for not making further and deeper cuts in the wages of employes so that already low rates of fare charged to the public may be further reduced.

So I can't help feeling a greater satisfaction in being in a position where I am on behalf of my men defending against assault wage scales which have been adjusted on a fair basis and which have been approved by a court, instead of fighting for the last possible reduction.

In no way will you gain greater success in the long run than in

being real sportsmen in treatment of those under your charge—with fairness, frankness, firmness. Most men will go a long way to meet you when they think you are square and will respond to frankness. For example, we check all our conductors every month. We tell them they are going to be checked and explain why—so that we can know they are all right as the handlers of money. They don't know when they are being checked but they can always see the results afterwards. They understand it and no longer worry about spotters spying on them. It is all right when they understand they are simply audited unawares or without knowing just when, just as a bank teller or a postoffice clerk is.

Remember that it is up to you to set an example of and to teach sportsmanship to those who haven't had your training and advantages.

We haven't needed any for a long time, but we used to have a number of so-called grievance arbitration cases. In one of those a certain minister of the highest character was agreed on by both sides as arbitrator. There was really no doubt about the guilt of the man whose case was in dispute, and the arbitrator so decided. But the head of the guilty man's organization could see only his own side—to protect one of his constituents; and in mailing to the arbitrator a check for his organization's half of the fee, he enclosed with it a note reading: "God help you as a minister!" Well that showed bad sportsmanship; but he didn't know any better. Afterwards this labor leader learned better and expressed regret for some things he had said and done.

So you must have patience with these things, continually watch that your own skirts are clear, and results will come.

The most successful and most lasting results come where the dealing is square. That's where for example the shining reputation of the A., T. & S. F. Ry. organization comes from—the outstanding sportsmanship (fair play, courage, imperturbability) of the late E. P. Riley, impressed on his associates and carried on down through the entire organization.

So what I preach to you is to carry into your business and professional and public careers the spirit of sportsmanship which has become second-nature to you in your games. No matter how foggy the conditions are, stick to the rules. If you find a rule is wrong try to get it changed in the orderly way.

Give the other fellow, especially anybody under you, all the credit that is coming to him. You will probably get enough credit and more in the long run, enough to balance all the hard knocks and kicks and misrepresentations which you are also sure to get.

Last winter we had a dinner at our St. Louis Harvard Club for one of our Cambridge football coaches, and it did one's heart good to join in the rousing cheers given for Aldrich, captain of the Yale team—our perennial antagonist, as a fine sportsman and a clean player "without reproach." That is the spirit!

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Vol. 1, No. 1, Dec., 1908. The Human Side of a Mining Engineer's Life. Edmund B. Kirby. (Commencement address, June 10, 1908.)

Vol. 1, No. 2, 38th Annual Catalogue, 1909-1910.

Vol. 1, No. 3, June, 1909. Education for Utility and Culture. Calvin M. Woodward. (Tau Beta Pi address.)

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Vol. 2, No. 3, June, 1910. Some of the Essentials of Success. Charles Summer Howe. (Commencement address, June 1, 1910.)

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Vol. 3, No. 1, Dec., 1910. Some Relations Between the Composition of a Mineral and Its Physical properties. G. H. Cox, E. P. Murray.

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Vol. 4, No. 3, June, 1912. Mining and Civilization. J. R. Finlay. (Commencement address, May 31, 1912.)

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Vol. 5, No. 2, March, 1913. 42nd Annual Catalogue, 1912-1913.

Vol. 5, No. 3. Never published.

Vol. 5, No. 4. Never published.

- Vol. 6, No. 1. Never published.
- Vol. 6, No. 2, March, 1914. 43rd Annual Catalogue, 1913-1914.
- Vol. 6, No. 3. Never published.
- Vol. 6, No. 4. Never published.
- Vol. 7, No. 1. Never published.
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- Vol. 7, No. 3, June, 1915. Description of special courses in oil and gas and allied subjects.
- Vol. 7, No. 4, Sept., 1915. Register of graduates, 1874-1915.
- Vol. 8, No. 1, Jan., 1916. Bibliography on Concentrating Ores by Flotation. Jesse Cunningham.
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- Vol. 8, No. 3, June, 1916. The Business of Mining. W. R. Ingalls. (Commencement address, May 26, 1916.)
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- Vol. 9, No. 1, Jan., 1917. Road Problems in the Ozarks. E. G. Harris. Bibliography on Rural Roads. H. L. Wheeler.
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- Vol. 11, No. 1, Jan., 1919. (*Never published.*)
- Vol. 11, No. 2, March, 1919. 48th Annual Catalogue, 1918-1919.
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Vol. 12, No. 3, June, 1920. Contemporary Novels and Novelists; A List of References. H. L. Wheeler.

Vol. 12, No. 4, October, 1920. Department of Vocational Education.

Vol. 13, No. 1. (*In preparation.*)

Vol. 13, No. 2, March, 1921. 50th Annual Catalogue, 1920-1921.

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Vol. 3, No. 1, Aug., 1916. Experiments from the Flotation Laboratory. C. Y. Clayton. (*Out of print.*)

Vol. 3, No. 2, Nov., 1916. Studies on the Origin of Missouri Cherts and Zinc Ores. G. H. Cox, R. S. Dean, and V. H. Gottschalk.

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Vol. 4, No. 2, Nov., 1917. The Effect of Addition Agents in Flotation. Part I. M. H. Thornberry and H. T. Mann.

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